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NEWS RELEASE

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December 6, 2004

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Focus on forest plan revision: special designations and areas

Note: This is the fifth in a six-part series. The first five articles will feature each of the five proposed revision topics. The sixth article will provide information about the comment process.

Kamiah –Rocky, snow-capped peaks. Vast tracts of remote, wild lands. Pristine, free-flowing rivers. Ancient, historically-significant trails. Communities of unique vegetation. These are some of the characteristics of national forest lands that are recognized with “special designations.”

According to Clearwater National Forest Supervisor Larry Dawson and Acting Nez Perce National Forest Supervisor Steve Williams, people are keenly interested in the designation of special areas as well as subsequent management direction. In many cases, these decisions will be made through forest plan revision.

As part of the revision process, forests are required to consider additions to the wilderness system. Ultimately Congress must act on any recommendation before lands can become designated wilderness.

Nearly 1.2 million acres of unique forest land on the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests have already been protected as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. According to national legislation, wilderness is defined as “. . . lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition. . . .” As a general rule motorized and mechanized equipment is not allowed in these areas.

Four wildernesses occur within the two forests: Selway-Bitterroot, Gospel-Hump, Frank Church-River of No Return and Hells Canyon. While the Hells Canyon Wilderness is physically located on the Nez Perce Forest, it is managed by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest headquartered in Enterprise, Oregon.

No new wilderness recommendations are proposed for the Nez Perce National Forest. Nearly 50%, or more than 926,000 acres of the 2.2-million-acre forest is already designated wilderness.

Approximately 198,000 acres of wilderness additions are proposed for the Clearwater National Forest including 113,000 of the Hoodoo Roadless Area (often referred to as The Great Burn), 66,700 of the Mallard-Larkins Roadless Area and 18,500 acres of additions to the existing Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

The 1.8-million-acre Clearwater National Forest currently includes nearly 260,000 acres of designated wilderness, all within the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

The agency also proposes to exclude motorized and most mechanized uses in areas recommended as wilderness. Generally this is different from direction in the existing forest plans.

A national roadless area rule proposed in 1999 generated intense national interest and prompted hundreds of north-central Idaho residents to comment. A final decision regarding that policy is pending.

While the national rule is being finalized, forests are required to address roadless area management through forest plan revision. Dawson and Williams expect there will be intense interest in this topic.

Locally the 1987 forest plans identified 16 inventoried roadless areas totaling 988,000 acres on the Clearwater Forest and 16 inventoried roadless areas totaling 502,000 acres on the Nez Perce Forest.

As part of revision, the forests will review the status of these lands. Acreage figures will be updated to reflect changes that have occurred as a result of road building, timber harvest and land exchanges.

When inventoried roadless areas are refined, the forests will undergo a process to evaluate if additional areas should be recommended for wilderness designation. Management direction will also be developed for all inventoried roadless lands.

Current forest plans permit active road building and timber harvest in many roadless areas. The Clearwater plan allows development in 55% of roadless lands while the Nez Perce plan permits development in 75% of these areas. Only a small percentage of roadless land was developed due to escalating road construction costs, evolving agency direction and increasing public opposition.

Given these factors, Dawson and Williams propose to limit road building in roadless areas, preferring fire as the primary vegetation management tool to reduce forest “fuels.” They envision limited timber harvest from these lands. Harvest operations would likely be conducted from existing roads in close proximity to roadless lands.

Individuals interested in learning more about the forests’ proposal for wilderness, roadless areas, wild and scenic rivers, research natural areas and other special areas are encouraged to read the proposed action and notice of intent to revise forest plans. Both are available at local Forest Service offices and on the internet at www.fs.fed.us/cnpz.

Public comments are appreciated and will be accepted through December 31, 2004.

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